



The Battalion/Task Force FSNCO and the MDMP

by Sergeant First Class Edward J. Zackery

Sergeants first class (SFCs) working in battalion/task force fire support elements (FSEs) as fire support NCOs (FSNCOs) usually are not involved in the military decision-making process (MDMP) during the planning and preparatory phases of their operations. And, as a key executors of the plan, they should be.

The planning steps in the MDMP are receipt of mission, mission analysis, course of action (COA) development, COA analysis (wargame), COA approval and orders production.

As many as 80 percent of the FSNCOs who come to the Combat Training Centers (CTCs) lack the experience, training and knowledge necessary to participate in the planning process with a battalion or task force staff. The process

can be intimidating for even the most experienced FSNCOs but especially so for newly promoted SFCs who have little or no training on mission analysis or COA comparison.

In this environment, the FSNCO is left out of planning and, therefore, seldom understands the integration of fire support with the scheme of maneuver. As a key executor of the battalion/task force fire support plan, he needs to know the *hows* and *whys* of the plan and how they'll complement each other during the course of the fight.

The Issue. The Military Occupational Specialty 13F Fire Support Specialist Advanced NCO Course (ANCOC) doesn't prepare an SFC to be involved in the MDMP. Fire support officers (FSOs) and maneuver staffs need to

understand this. In many cases, the FSNCO's level of proficiency comes solely from his FSO's mentoring. Even the Sergeants Major Academy's NCO Battle Staff Course at Fort Bliss, Texas, doesn't get into the level of detail in planning most battalion/task force staffs achieve when preparing for a battle.

An FSNCO can be very knowledgeable and hard-charging but still lack the knowledge to pull simple things from a brigade operations order (OPORD) for the FSO's mission analysis briefing. This is partly because he doesn't understand the concept of the ongoing staff estimate; in most cases, no one has trained him in what's needed for the mission analysis briefing. Telling the FSNCO to extract from the brigade OPORD what he thinks the FSO will

need for the briefing usually ends in disappointment for the FSO.

The FSO expects his FSNCO to understand the orders process. However, only when the FSE is deployed does the FSO realize his FSNCO lacks the knowledge to participate in the MDMP. By then, due to the high operations tempo (OPTEMPO), it's too late to teach the FSNCO the orders process.

FSOs and maneuver staffs correctly rely on the targeting officer to start the planning process while the FSO is at the brigade OPORD briefing—the targeting officer must be able to accomplish the mission analysis. But the FSNCO's MDMP duties should not be left to the targeting officer. *FM 6-20-40 Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs) for Fire Support Brigade Operations, Heavy* and *FM 6-20-50 TTPs for Fire Support Brigade Operations, Light* clearly state that the FSNCO “must be able to perform all the duties of his FSO.” The FSO needs a knowledgeable, trained FSNCO to have a fully functional FSE and maneuver tactical operations center (TOC).

For some FSNCOs, it's simply a matter of getting involved in the MDMP. It's the FSNCO's job to participate in the planning process. He first should read *FM 101-5 Army Planning and Orders Production* to understand the orders process.

Then he needs the same training that most battalion/task force staffs have before a major deployment. This way he can watch, ask questions and under-

stand the different steps of the MDMP. Only after the FSNCO has begun to understand the planning process can he begin to use the knowledge he has gained throughout his career to integrate fires with maneuver.

The FSO must ensure the maneuver staff understands the importance of having the FSNCO at the table during the planning process. The fire support sergeant brings his technical expertise and years of experience—the capabilities of the company fire support team (FIST) and the knowledge and experience of his personnel. He's the technical expert and knows the capabilities of the equipment in his platoon.

Knowledge of and participation in the MDMP is usually an officer function on the maneuver side. The FSNCO should not be intimidated.

A Solution. The 13F ANCOC program of instruction (POI) should cover the MDMP at the level of detail that the battalion/task force NCO needs to understand it. The FA School could combine a week of the FA Officer Career Course (FACCC) that has instruction on the MDMP with ANCOC so artillery officers and NCOs can work and learn together. This would allow them to understand each other's role in the orders process at the battalion/task force and the brigade levels. It also would help the NCO realize he's an integral part of the orders process.

The FSNCO must participate in train-ups that include the FSO and maneuver

staff at home station. If this training doesn't occur, the FSNCO becomes just another NCO in the TOC and not a fully integrated executor of the maneuver/fire support plan.

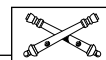
During planning and preparation for a deployment, the FSO must train his FSNCO. A simple training plan can include only the FSO and FSNCO, or the brigade FSO and FSNCO can implement a series of combined officer-NCO professional development sessions on the subject.

The bottom line is that the FSO must train the FSNCO on the MDMP. There is no formal training available to him. For the FSNCO who suggests that knowing the MDMP is really not his job, I suggest that he step back and reevaluate himself as an NCO.

The most immediate training solution lies with the FSNCO. He must ask questions aggressively; he must have the FSO explain *in detail* how the supported maneuver unit planning process works.

Understanding the MDMP is the first step; watching it put into action at the battalion/task force level is next. The more the FSNCO participates, the more knowledgeable he becomes.

The sooner the FSNCOs get formal instruction on the MDMP, the better. The FSNCO must continue to learn and grow as a fire supporter and be the FSO's right-hand man, capable of filling the FSO's shoes in his absence.



The company FSO of 1-9 FA, 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized), and his FSNCO discuss engagement area development at the NTC.

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